



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 6
1445 ROSS AVENUE, SUITE 1200
DALLAS TX 75202-2733

Mr. Joseph Ranson, Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
646 Cajundome Blvd., Suite 400
Lafayette, LA 70506

FEB 27 2017

Dear Mr. Ranson:

This letter serves to continue informal consultation under Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) regarding EPA's approval of amendments to Louisiana's water quality standards that was initiated through Russell Nelson's initial February 2, 2017 email to your Deputy Field Supervisor, Brad Rieck. In that communication, we noted that Louisiana had adopted amendments to Title 33, Part IX, Chapter 11 of the Louisiana Surface Water Quality Standards. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved these amendments under Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 303(c) and its implementing regulation at 40 CFR Part 131 on June 3, 2016. EPA requests any information or input from the Service's concerning possible effects of the amended DO criterion on threatened and endangered species in the affected area.

The revised standards are limited to the dissolved oxygen (DO) criterion for a specific waterbody type in the eastern Lower Mississippi Alluvial Plain (eLMRAP) basin. Louisiana derived seasonally applicable minimum DO criteria from observed DO patterns of representative reference sites within the ecoregion. The seasonal DO criterion adopted for waters in the eLMRAP ecoregion is as follows:

Inland Streams 2.3 mg/L - March through November

The original DO criterion of 5.0 mg/L (for inland streams) remains in effect for the months of December through February. The DO criterion of 4.0 mg/L applicable to estuarine waters has not changed. A copy of the revised standards is enclosed which identifies the waters where the revised criterion applies.

EPA's June 3, 2016 approval noted the obligation to consult under Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA. In that action, EPA also noted that its approval action may be "subject to the results of consultation" in that EPA has authority to take additional action regarding the DO criterion if EPA's consultation with the Services identifies deficiencies in the revised water quality standards require remedial action by EPA. If federally-listed threatened and endangered species may be affected, EPA will continue to consult with the Services.

EPA has identified and defined the action area as to be the specific waterbodies in the eLMRAP basin and identified a number of federally-listed threatened and endangered species that may potentially occur within the eLMRAP through the Service's Environmental Conservation Online System Information for Planning and Consultation site. EPA is seeking the Service's input on whether the revised water column DO criteria may affect the following species.

Birds

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)
Red Knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*)
Red-Cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*)

Mammals

West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*)

Ferns and Allies

Louisiana quillwort (*Isoetes louisianensis*)

Fishes

Atlantic sturgeon (Gulf subspecies) (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*)
Pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*)

Mussels

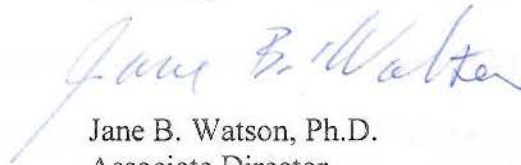
Alabama (=inflated) heelsplitter (*Potamilus inflatus*)

Reptiles

Gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)
Ring Map turtle (*Gratemys oculifera*)
Hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)
Kemp's Ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*)
Leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)
Loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*)

EPA would appreciate any specific information that the Service can provide regarding the effects of water column DO on these species within the defined action area. If you have any questions concerning this letter or action, please contact Russell Nelson of my staff at (214) 665-6646 or by email at nelson.russell@epa.gov.

Sincerely,



Jane B. Watson, Ph.D.
Associate Director,
Ecosystems Protection Branch (6WQ-E)

cc: Brad Rieck, Deputy Field Supervisor
w/enclosure: Monica Sikes, Endangered Species Coordinator